

"there are three different kinds of brains, the one understands things unassisted, the other understands things when shown by others, the third understands neither alone nor with the explanations of others. the first kind is most excellent, the second is also excellent, but third useless.... for every time the prince has the judgment to know the good and evil that anyone does or says, even if he has no originality of intellect, yet he can recognize the bad and good works of his minister and correct the one and encourage the other; and the minister cannot hope to deceive him and therefore remains good."

benzene #46

december 10, 1988

special george h.w. bush issue

walker is george's mother's maiden name, by the way. dukakis's middle name, believe it or not, is stanley. during the primaries i kept a look out for candidates' middle names, but i saw surprisingly few. jack french kemp and marion gordon robertson are the only others i know for sure. i believe gephardt and simon are richard andrew and paul martin, but i'm not certain of either. and i still don't know what the j stands for in j danforth quayle.

this is benzene, an approximately monthly ~~pub~~zene, loosely associated with the postal diplomacy hobby, published by ignatz jerome "mark" lew, who resides at 438 vernon #103, oakland, CA 94610, and can be phoned at (415) 268-8626. sub rates are 60¢ per issue, and trades are welcome. approximately monthly means 12 times a year, and this is only my 11th issue for 1988, so i need to do one more if i am to live up to my billing. doug and frank are coming to visit on the 20th. if i don't get it done before then it won't happen.

with this issue, bz has moved stylistically one step closer to the great zeen of the early 80s, the brutus bulletin. i've finally given up pretending that an issue of benzene is artistically a single work and i've typed up most of it (6½ pages) ahead of time, before knowing just where those pages would fit in. in the first issue this year, i promised myself that i'd limit issues to six pages each -- a promise i soon broke. now i'm using one ounce as my limit, which means ten pages if i put it in an envelope (which i must for my canadian subbers). that means i have only three pages left, and i want to fit chris carrier's letter in because i know if i bump it again he will redouble his efforts to pester me on the phone. so unless i've misjudged, scrabble will have to wait until next issue. hm. good thing i don't try to run any dip games.

it occurs to me that many of my readers are anxiously anticipating, in this the post-election issue, a comprehensive treatment of the question, whither the democratic party? so was i for a while, but that topic, like about half the topics i've ever planned to address here, was one that i got hopelessly bogged down in. my fans might be interested to know that much of what i had to say ended up in a brief discourse on liberalism in a letter i'm sending to francois cuerrier's pas-schendaale. (did i hyphenate that right? i believe it's a flemish name.) n is, as far as i know, the only dipzeen which comes close to matching bz's political content, and it is recommended by me. (2303 eglinton ave E #305, scarborough, ont. M1K 2N6)

partly because i was so unsurprised and partly because i was fairly ambivalent to start with, i was not nearly as distressed as were my liberal friends about the defeat of our presidential candidate.. during the campaign i was told by some of them that george bush is evil. i questioned their use of the word, but they seriously meant it. mr bush is not just stupid or misguided or unprincipled or mean, i was told, he is in fact a force of evil.

hello? what are we, hobbits in middle earth? will bush die if we find the ring of power and drop it in a volcano? as the existence of benzene indicates, i happen to think that national politics is pretty important and deserving of more attention than it is given by most americans, but such an excessive reaction as to see disagreements over how to run the government as a manichaeian struggle of cosmic proportion is, i think, evidence of a persecuted mind. try to imagine what it must be like to wake up every morning believing that one lives in a country which is ruled

by diabolical fiends. no wonder so many of these people are perpetually unhappy.

on the whole i've been quite pleased with the presidential transition period. at the very least, it's been more encouraging than i expected. the old bush is back, and better than i've ever seen him. after digging himself into pits of confrontationalism during the campaign, he has now set aside his shovel and has begun the climb back to the surface. without seeming to try, he has contrasted himself to reagan in ways which i find very refreshing. (as the president's approval rating approaches 70% i still count myself among the 30.) it's quite clear that mr bush intends to keep himself up to date about what's going on in the world -- not to mention what is going on in his own administration. before the reagan era, this is what was expected of a president and was not considered at all extraordinary. i still think that the executive branch of government holds far more power than it ought to, but it comforts me to know that once again our chief concern is that the chief executive will turn out to be a crook masterminding a crooked operation (improbably, i think), rather than that a collection of crooked subordinates are deceiving their colleagues and pursuing their own crooked agenda within the administration while the president is intellectually too lazy and negligent to know about it.

it also refreshes me to see bush speaking eagerly, frequently, and sometimes even meaningfully to the press, as if he's willing to give the public the benefit of the doubt and treat them as thoughtful people rather than as an audience to be entertained. dare i hope that such an encouragement might lead the public to actually become more thoughtful? i don't know to what extent bush's meetings with dole, dukakis, jackson, and the others is show, and to what extent it is serious, but in any case i think it's a classy thing to do. i was particularly thrilled to see bush come out of a meeting with jackson saying "i'll be seeking his advice in the future. he's got some good ideas." i don't hesitate to remind benzene readers that jackson's good ideas are heavily outnumbered by his bad ones, but it didn't hurt bush any to be nice, and a pattern of such gestures could go a long way in maintaining the country's social cohesion. to me, that shows class.

i haven't had a significant reaction to any of the cabinet appointments, though i like the general picture. none of them particularly offended me, not even john sununu who is supposed to be the favorite of the right-wingers. nor did any of them thrill me, though i was pleased to see dick darman end up at the office of management and budget rather than somewhere else. darman, a legislative strategist par excellence, has long been james baker's right-hand man, so it was inevitable that he'd have a place in the government somewhere. he is also an enormously clever man (which always appeals to me) whose knowledge of budget figures is unsurpassed, but more important he has a sense of perspective which keeps him in touch with reality. he's sort of a david stockman without the hubris, if you can imagine such a thing.

minds as quirky as mine will be amused to note that designated chief of staff sununu is not the only half-lebanese new englander in the news these days. those who know me as a conservative democrat with a fondness for southerners might expect me to have preferred bennett johnston (d,la) as senate majority leader, but i was pleased to see george mitchell (d,me) elected. i think newspaper headliners' tendency to label mr mitchell a "northeastern liberal" is misguided. (i fancy myself an expert on the geographical taxonomy of liberalism.) to be a northeastern liberal is not simply the conjunction of being liberal and being from the northeast (and mitchell is both); the term refers to a way of thinking which is prevalent in the urban areas from washington d.c. to boston but doesn't spread much further. geographically, mr mitchell does not qualify.

my sense of maine's political culture (which readers who have actually visited maine are free to criticize) is that it has more in common with non-urban michigan, minnesota and wisconsin, than with its geographical neighbors. demographics and history back me up on this, i think. like MI, MN and WI, maine was settled in the early 1800s by americans mostly of northern european descent leaving the original colonies for an agricultural life on the frontier.

nor does mitchell qualify ideologically. probably the liberal trait most

frequently associated with the northeastern brand of liberalism is advocacy of government spending. the national taxpayers union annually rates each member of congress based on his opposition to government spending. in 1986* mitchell was rated 49 (out of 100) which is higher than all but three senate democrats, two of whom retire at the end of the year. proxmire (d,wi) was NTU's overwhelming favorite; his rating of 83 beat out second-place gordon humphrey (r,nh) by ten points. budget committee chairman lawton chiles (d,fl) beat mitchell by three points, and paul simon (d,il) beat him by one.

mr mitchell appeals to me because of his logically precise way of thinking and speaking. it is true, as is commonly reported, that he communicates well on television, but unlike ronald reagan or jesse jackson, mitchell owes his talent not to an ability to paint over issues with an emotionally appealing but obfuscatingly broad brush of oratory, but to an exactness of thought which enables him to immediately focus on the essence of an issue. when he isn't summarizing for the impatient television-watching public, he is the sort of person who often begins his sentences with clauses like, "it occurs to me that," or "it is evident to me that," and i can't help but like that. perhaps you recall his celebrated lecture on patriotism to oliver north. that lecture began with, "recognize that it is possible."

george mitchell wouldn't have made a mistake like the one chris carrier recently made. since i endorsed dukakis in bz44 my succinct declaration of what i think is wrong with the democratic party, written in april (bz39, p2), is once again being quoted. mr carrier, following in brad wilson's footsteps, made the argument a lead-in to a recent issue of his zeen. unfortunately, whereas in benzene the sentence began with, "more significantly, i'm not convinced that," chris began the sentence with, "i really don't think that." while both signify a denial of the clause which follows, i find that chris's version goes much further in implying a belief in the clause's contradiction -- an implication i intentionally refrained from making. chris tells me he doesn't see the difference. i do.

or am i just being overly fussy?

(continued from page 11)

they are not the ones to which i am most firmly committed. some of the vague mushy issues, notably social philosophy, are the hardest for me to compromise. no candidate is ever going to satisfy me on every issue. to see which of my opinions i'm most willing to sacrifice just look at which candidates i support. al gore is most certainly not a libertarian.

TITAN

no comments on the titan variant yet. i reread the rules and noticed a few places where they could have been a bit more clear:

in rule 3, revise the third sentence so it ends, "considered a defender; his legion marker is taken from the masterboard and will start on the turn record track at his maneuver phase this turn."

in rule 8, revise the first sentence so it reads in part, "fourth maneuver phase as a defender (i.e., when his legion marker reaches 4 on the turn record track."

in rule 9, add to the end of the final sentence, "(to different battles)."

FILLER

amusing thought: i hear that former education secretary william bennett wants to be the drug czar. hm. mr bennett has a few qualities which i like, and i even made a special issue for him once. even then there were other qualities about him which i didn't like as much, and that list has grown. still, he amuses me, and i wouldn't mind seeing him stick around.

* my list shows the 1986 ratings of the 1987 senate, and thus excludes senators who retired at the end of 1986 (e.g., gary hart).

LETTERS

pete gaughan (10/6): "the dallas symphony just pulled in some rave reviews at carnegie hall -- too bad that's the only performing art that gets any support in this area. the dallas ballet just sent ten dancers on an exhibition in denmark, as a farewell; they're folding as soon as they get back! about the only creative activity that's well-attended is shakespeare in the park (which is free), though about once a year we get some form of museum show worth going to (how can callas/fort worth have five world-class museums and only one show a year worth attending??).

"oh, i'm sorry -- new topic. well, you'll handle it, i'm sure you have an opinion on the performing and visual arts, being a singing-type person. ((actually i don't, unless apathy counts as an opinion. i rarely participate in the arts as an audience (i've seen more operas from the back than from the front). bond propositions to fund the arts fare no better on my ballot than do any other propositions -- to the distress of many of my arts-community friends.))

"my beef with quayle is not that he's rich, it's that he's dumb (way below-average performance in school), lazy (yes, he is a senate underachiever -- what a nice euphemism for 'do-nothing'), and arrogant (jack kennedy parallels? give me two breaks).

"my beef with bush is that he is fuzzy-minded. he doesn't have a firm idea or plan in most areas i care about (environment, deficit, human rights); and where he does have a firm idea (taxes, defense, abortion) i disagree with him, and get the feeling that he doesn't have these ideas because he decided to, but because someone else told him to.

"my beef with dukakis is that he doesn't demonstrate the balls it will take to reign in the federal bureaucracy, and he struggles to defend himself.

"i've lived in texas five years no (jesus christ, that just hit me ... wow), so i know bentsen and only have one or two minor, minor beefs with him -- primarily his view of tax breaks for energy companies, but i have these same beefs with all the candidates.

"so i'd like to vote for willa kenoyer, but barred from the opportunity i'll find it much easier to overcome my beefs against dukakis-bentsen.

"carrier has a big problem; fundamentalists and veggies are, overwhelmingly, not devoted to their causes for their own ego-boo. ((i agree.)) maybe the pharisees were, but my information says they weren't either. as a former fundy, i can tell you that they are just like the rest of us -- swayed by a combination of logic and emotion. you may argue with the ideas or feelings that cause them to come to believe as they do, but, c'mon, let's drop the idea that people choose their religion because they are conscious of a social benefit that will accrue to them. maybe in the ussr. no, if you want to insult someone in benzene, at least do it by empirical means.

"i see labor and business as enemies because they see it that way. show me a business or industry where they don't feel enmity and i'll agree that they're not enemies there. as a manager, i can tell you that every retail operation treats its wage labor as 'them,' to be taken advantage of insofar as possible. (i love that word, 'insofar.' carlin used to do a bit on insecure words -- things like 'inscrutable' carry prestige, but 'none,' 'the,' and 'less' have to band together....)

me: i regret bursting your bubble (well, okay, maybe i don't regret it), but while "insofar" is a single word, "insofaras" is not. don't try that one in scrabble.

you're quite right that labor and business see themselves as enemies. my point is that they'd both be better off if they didn't. of course they have some conflicts of interest, just as the united states and the soviet union do, but they still live in the same world and thus have many more interests in common.

my major beef with bentsen is that he's completely at ease with the idea that the federal government's role is to serve as a clearinghouse to which money from every state travels, turns around, and goes back out again. the problem is that, like napoleon's army marching on moscow, the host of money marching on washington is bound to suffer attrition on the way in and on the way out. furthermore, no matter how good are the intentions of the government to direct the flow of money toward the poor, needy, and deserving, the inevitable result is that most of it ends up going to

whoever has the most political influence, and potential receivers will thus concern themselves with playing the government game, rather than doing something more useful.

give me two breaks. winston churchill, thomas edison, and albert einstein are merely a few on the long list of smart guys who performed poorly in school. quayle is neither dumb nor lazy. in the senate he doesn't pontificate like joe Biden or attach his name to lots of bills like Gephardt, but he does work. much of the senate's workload is mundane stuff like cranking out those huge bills which keep the bureaucracy humming along. i don't want to say that any of Quayle's work is especially inspiring, but he is certainly not a "do-nothing."

i agree that Bush's ideas generally come from others and not from himself, but i don't think that makes him fuzzy-minded, and it doesn't prove that he can't be a good leader. perhaps Mr Bush is an excellent example of the second kind of brain described by Machiavelli: he does seem to lack originality of intellect, but he has, i think, shown some indication of a talent for recognizing good work.

ed wrobel (10/11): "i was struck by your discussion of the minimum wage and labor-management relations on page 14 of benzene #43. how can you begin with 'labor is a commodity' (a good marxist analysis) ((adam smith said it first)) and end with 'what's good for business is generally good for labor and vice versa' (what's good for general motors is good for the usa)? is what's good for col sanders the same as what's good for the chickens? to the extent that the colonel prospers and gives the chickens good food and a healthful environment -- yes, their interests do coincide. but we chickens know what the colonel's really all about. he's not going to part with any more of his profits than he must. capitalists seek to minimize the cost of production. workers seek to maximize their wages. why is that so hard to accept? sure, neither wants the enterprise to collapse but within that commonality there is much room for discussion about who gets how much of what.

"call me short-sighted and incapable of recognizing what's good for me but i'm not prepared to strike for the 'right to work for less.' i would suggest, however, that those 'right-to-work' enthusiasts change the name of their lobbyist to the 'national right-to-work-for-less coalition.' boy, would that ever pump up the membership list." ((1))

"kudos to you for your comments on cheap shots (pledge of allegiance and prison furlough). and just to demonstrate that i am not quite as knee-jerk as you may believe, may i add dukakis's social security attack on bush to the cheap shot list. as a group, the elderly are now better off than many segments of society. bush's tie-breaking vote just made a cost-of-living increase a bit smaller, a wholly justified step.

"since heartlessly calling poor nancy 'what's-her-name,' i have seen a few more thirtysomething reruns and now know her name (i.e., her character's name). i dispassionately note that you declined to mention the name of the actress who plays elliot's wife nancy. (i don't know it either.)" ((i do and did. she is patricia wettig, real-life wife of ken olin, who plays michael on the same show.))

"i'd like to see your football predictions and analyses." ((2))

"ah-hem, yes, i caught that remark on page 7 about 'reading too much sci-fi.' in fact, i've been pretty much off the stuff for years, ever since i took those night classes in english and american literature. but i've slipped back into it on occasion over the past year and am currently on a -- well, i guess you'd call it a binge. john brunner's the sheep look up was a really disgusting but morbidly fascinating eco-disaster book. i wonder if george bush the environmentalist read it recently and was converted -- could that account for his emergence as a leading light in protecting the environment? there was so much in brunner's book that reminded me of reading the newspaper. scary. tell me something that will reassure me, okay?" ((5)) "now i'm reading brunner's the crucible of time, also excellent and less scary. i requested a reserve at the library on wizard, the second book in john varley's trilogy. first book was titan (reference jupiter moon, not my favorite TAHGC board game -- but i picked it off the shelf in part because of the title). i've also read some varley short stories. i'm beginning to believe that there are now a number of sci-fi writers who are good craftsmen. what drove me away from sci-fi years ago -- besides

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snobbery -- was the perception that most sci-fi writers were clumsy with a pen (now they have word processors). i don't know enough science to be skeptical of warp factors and such so even the most improbable sci-fi conventions don't bother me." ((3))

"what does bother me is your reply to hood's letter on page 9 and 10 ((bz#43)). i suppose 'social welfare programs don't work' is practically a cliché nowadays but i must ask you why you assert that abolition of the welfare state is the best way to achieve a better balance of wealth. do you know of any evidence of a natural tendency of wealth to become more balanced?" ((4))

"regarding carrier's comments on eating flesh -- as sentient beings, we are not compelled to imitate either the brutal practices of our ancestors or the violence of the predator in nature. a shark has no choice. we can choose. his appeal to the natural order of things as validating the practice of eating flesh is, oddly enough, parallel to your analysis of animal rights activists' 'nature is good' theme. both carrier and your anthropophobes (great word, by the way) view the natural way as the right way, yet have startlingly contrasting views of nature. to carrier, nature is violent; people, by comparison, are relatively benign. the anthropophobes view nature as benign and people as generally disruptive and frequently brutal. fascinating ((and impressively insightful on your part, i think)). i would agree with carrier that life in nature can be nasty, brutish and short. as people, though, we should strive to reduce suffering rather than look to nature to justify uncaring, selfish behavior." ((i agree.))

"speaking of unnatural acts, you mean the official scrabble player's dictionary lists oxeye but not ade -- cheesh, probably doesn't have kleenex or coke, either -- well, maybe coke.

"benzene is now my favorite dipzine."

me: i'm glad to hear it.

random house's college dictionary lists oxeye but not ade. oxford's concise dictionary lists oxeye but not ade. american heritage's 2nd college lists oxeye but not ade. merriam webster's 9th collegiate lists oxeye but not ade. cheesh.

1. certainly labor and business want to push wages in opposite directions; that is the nature of bargaining. a guy who wants to sell his old car and the guy who wants to buy it have a conflicting interest in the price, but there is a wide range of prices at which both will be happy to see the transaction take place. thus they have a common interest in the classified ads which helped them find one another, in a minimum of paperwork at the dmv, in the freedom to do business without interference from some authority, and not least of all in acting agreeable toward one another. labor and business obviously have both common and conflicting interests. it is my belief that the latter are exaggerated and the former are insufficiently appreciated.

my observation has been that workers who forgo the confrontational attitude and adopt their employer's goal as their own tend to be more successful. (i've been told that this is less true in big companies, where the employer is more distant.) i suspect also that those businesses which see their employees as a resource to cultivate and not to exploit are more likely to succeed.

the fundamental difference between american workers and the colonel's chickens (aside from the obvious one that employers do not kill and eat their employees) is that the colonel doesn't offer the chickens the opportunity to elect to do something else. a worker, unlike a chicken or a shark, has a choice. someone with a low-paying job may not be pleased with his situation, but clearly he is better off with that job than without. otherwise he wouldn't have taken the job. to argue otherwise is to argue that he is not qualified to decide what is best for himself. assuming that he is a sane adult, i reject that argument.

2. since i didn't get any pre-season studying in, i decided to skip the analyzing this year and concentrate instead on rooting. over the years the teams have, for mostly arbitrary reasons, fallen into the categories of teams i really like, teams i sorta like, teams i sorta don't like, and teams i really don't like. on any given weekend, i can find at least one game in which i have a strong interest in the out-

come. (usually my attention span isn't long enough to watch two games in one day.) my three favorite teams are all doing about average, but while indianapolis and cleveland are performing below expectations, phoenix is doing better than expected, so i've concentrated most of my rooting on the cardinals.

but i can see you want a prediction. okay, after 10 games my guess is that the division champs will be: buffalo, cincinnati, seattle, giants, chicago, rams. my playoff scenario goes like this: in the afc, cleveland beats houston in the wildcard game and goes on to upset buffalo, but loses to cincinnati. in the nfc, new orleans beats minnesota in the wildcard game (both washington and san francisco miss the playoffs this year) but then loses to chicago; the rams trounce the giants and then squeak out a win over chicago. both conference championships will be good games, but in the superbowl, once again the nfc will dominate the afc with superior defense.

remember that for the past four superbowls the winner has been the previous year's nfc runner-up. if that pattern continues, this year's superbowl champ will be minnesota. in my opinion, if minnesota wins the nfc, the afc will have a rare opportunity to win the superbowl; either buffalo or cleveland could win against minnesota, i think. (i now think minnesota could beat any afc team in the superbowl.)

(that was written a few games ago, before the rams extended their losing streak from one to four (which suits me fine rooting-wise; i don't much like the rams). switch the rams and the saints and the scenario still looks reasonable. but now i have a real prediction: next season, the atlanta falcons will not have the worst record in the nfc west. think about that. and wait for it.

3. i don't really object to improbable technology; i object to conceptual inconsistencies. time travel (except as defined in vonnegut's slaughterhouse five) is a good example. authors need to ask themselves what constitutes the concept of time. the only thing that defines instant A as "before" instant B is that during instant A one anticipates instant B but during instant B one remembers instant A. thus, as schopenhauer pointed out back in 1819, time is a function of the brain.

so if the enterprise gets caught in a time warp and captain kirk says, "gee, a few minutes ago we were in the 23rd century," he hasn't really gone into the past, has he?

4. yes i do. the evidence of the natural tendency of wealth to become balanced is a comparison of the balance of wealth in various nations. that we think we have such a poor balance of wealth in the united states is yet another example of americans' lack of international perspective. in fact, ours is one of the best (and our balance of social status is unsurpassed). the united states compares very favorably with nations burdened with interfering bureaucracies, such as india, south africa, and brazil. in general, the worst balances of wealth are in the poorest countries, where the economies are stagnant and there are no intranational economic transactions going on to even people out.

people who already have a lot of money do not value it as much as people who don't have it. (i believe economists would call this the principle of marginal utility applied to money.) therefore rich people are more willing to give away some of their money in exchange for some service, and poor people are more willing to provide some service in exchange for money. if for instance there is an opportunity to earn some money by collecting aluminum cans out of trash cans and turning them in for recycling, someone who needed money would be interested in doing that, but someone who already had a lot of money would rather not bother. on the other hand, if a poor person were faced with a sink full of dirty dishes he may grumble and complain but he'll wash them. a similarly burdened rich person might just decide that he'd rather pay someone else to wash the dishes for him. in short, people would rather enjoy themselves. richer people can afford to do this and so they will, and on the whole the money they spend on their leisure will end up going to the poorer people, who are more willing to work. in the real world, there are many many complicating factors which counter and offset this tendency, but the tendency is there, and because it is a product of human

nature, i call it a "natural tendency."

note that this doesn't mean that poor people don't have to work harder than rich people. obviously they do. it is precisely because rich people can afford to be lazy that the poor people have a tendency to catch up.

5. bush has sensitive political antennae and isn't afraid to move away from an obsolete position. that explains his conversion to (moderate) environmentalism.

you weren't specific about what you find so scary, so i'll address a variety. let's start by putting to rest the notion that we're running out of room for people on the planet: consider the total land area on the planet -- excluding antarctica -- and assume that one-third of it is uninhabitable (a reasonable assumption, i think). if we add five billion new people (i.e., double our population), the population density in the inhabitable part of the planet would still be less than the current population density of france, which is plenty roomy. now the advocates of zero population growth tell us that we will double the population some time near the middle of the next century. fine. if we quintuple the population, we'll still have a population density in the inhabitable areas less than that of west germany, which is a bit crowded but certainly not unmanageable. that's an addition of 20 billion people -- a truly enormous amount -- and we can fit them in nicely. and don't forget that while my figures suggest that in every west-germany-sized chunk of land there will be a west-germany-sized population, in fact many west-germany-sized chunks -- in china and india, say -- would be holding much more than their share (as they do now), so you can expect that, in addition to that one-third of the planet which we set aside untouched, there'll still be plenty of sparsely settled areas.

but the zero-poppers are worried about things other than space. in a direct-mail letter which i was given, zpg warns that if we don't stop overpopulating we'll run out of room in our schools and hospitals, and we'll run out of energy, steel, grain, and water. the first concern is ridiculous. the product provided by schools and hospitals is one that is produced by people, and thus a population increase increases our ability to teach and to heal just as much as it increases our need for it. the reassuring thing to recall about the various resource scarcities is that none of them represents an actual lack of the product; they simply represent a need to get it from one place to another. there's no lack of food, but we need to find a way to get it to the hungry people. there's no lack of steel or other building materials, but much of it ends up in abandoned structures or garbage dumps and needs to be recycled. there's no lack of water, but much of it is in the wrong place and much of it is polluted. even the ozone problem is a distribution problem in a sense: while there's too much ozone in the mesosphere (where the ozone layer is), there's too much ozone in the stratosphere just below.

what this means is that resource problems are solvable. there isn't a scientific brick wall we're running up against, as there would be if for some reason we needed to move faster than light, or if we needed some substance and there simply wasn't enough of it. remember also that most resource problems have an upper bound to how bad they can become. i remember reading a description of how it is possible to send a ship up north to a glacier somewhere, cut out a big chunk of ice, and tow it back to los angeles and sell the water. presumably it wasn't an economical project (or else someone would have done it), but if the price of water ever gets high enough, it will be. besides that, it's possible to take water from the ocean and purify it. i understand that they do some of that in israel, where other options are limited. here in california we don't have to, because there are still a few mountain streams left to be dammed up. but if we ever run out of streams, there are fallback plans. it's not as if we'll all have to die of thirst. similarly, we have plenty of alternate energy technologies to fall back on (solar, geothermal, biomass). so far, none of them is cheaper than pumping oil out of the ground and burning it, but if ever we did run out of oil, we'd have other options.

a few weeks ago i attended a luncheon for sen al gore (d,tn) and he recalled (with some pride) that when he announced his candidacy for president 18 months ago he said that by election day the depletion of the ozone layer would be a national issue. the claim was ignored by most and ridiculed by a few (such as george will),

but the senator (who, i believe, is visiting antarctica even as we speak) has been proven correct. it should reassure you that environmental issues are now firmly established on the national agenda. that in itself is not sufficient to cause solutions to be found, but it's a start. i think you'll find that the gradual destruction of the environment which we've been witnessing for so long will now begin to slow down and will eventually reverse. some reversals are already happening. the international conference on chlorofluorocarbons resulted in agreements which have greatly reduced the use of aerosol spray cans (witness the popularity of trigger pumps) and cfc-filled styrofoams (mcdonalds plans to switch to paper burger boxes in january). the rhine used to be a free dumping ground for all sorts of nasty chemicals, but now the governments of the nations along the rhine have established a program through which companies must purchase the right to dump their chemicals. i don't think anyone is ready to say the rhine is clean, but it is decidedly less dirty than it was.

the idea of setting a price on the right to pollute is offensive to many, but it's an important concept. grass-roots environmentalists are accustomed to campaigns which raise ecological awareness and concern. these campaigns ("love your mother," "give a hoot, don't pollute") are good for reducing littering and encouraging recycling and drumming up political support for local projects. but if the environmentalists want to address any audience besides members of the populace, they'll have to stop saying "pollution is wrong" and start saying "pollution is costly." pollution is fundamentally a problem of market failure, and it is now being recognized as such. if mastercard were to change its policy so that all charges made by cardholders were added to one common account for which everyone is equally responsible, there would be little incentive for anyone to spend money wisely. like these fictitious cardholders, the polluter knows that the benefit he gains by polluting does not outweigh the cost to the community, but it does outweigh his own share of the cost.

the answer to this failure is to make the polluter responsible for the costs he incurs, and this is happening around the rhine and elsewhere. here in california, the obvious example is the deposit we pay on aluminum cans. when someone buys a soda, he pays one cent (in oregon it's five cents) for the right to allow the can to end up in a garbage dump. he may choose not to exercise that right, and his penny is refunded when he turns the can in at a recycling center. or he may choose, essentially, to hire someone else to recycle for him, by allowing a homeless person to fish the can out of the trash and turn it in. this is a powerful economic concept which deserves to be put to greater use, and i expect that it will. norwegians must pay a deposit when they buy an automobile, to be refunded when the car is recycled for its metal.

here in america, where the polluters are mostly the big companies and most environmentalists have developed a disestablishmentarianist attitude, it's easy to forget that in most of the world, it is poverty that leads to deterioration of the environment. land conservation makes good sense economically, but only to someone who has a bit of capital and enjoys protected property rights. the bangladeshi farmer knows that in the long run he'd do well to take the time to terrace his land, but he needs crops right now and he can't afford to pay workers, or invest his own time, for something that won't pay off until next year. the herdsman in niger knows that overgrazing destroys land, but if he chooses to let the grass grow, some other herdsman will come along and use it instead. the good news for the environment is that prosperity and property rights are slowly gaining ground in the third world (and perhaps in the soviet union, probably the world's worst polluter). so is peace (war is another destroyer of the environment).

one of the crazy ideas on star trek which isn't quite as crazy as it seems is the machine that makes food for them. when i was leaving alaska they had just built the united states' first surimi plant. surimi is a food product, developed in japan, made from herring or some other cheap and plentiful fish. its primary use is in that imitation crab sort of stuff you see in the store, but the newer technology breaks down the product even further and removes those substances which give the food its fishy quality. surimi is now being used as a filler in sandwich meats, pasta, condiments, and probably plenty of other foods i don't know about. in a sense, it isn't really fish meat at all, it's just generic food material. i think we can expect the food

industry to keep finding better ways to dress this stuff up and make it taste like whatever we want. after that perhaps they'll stop using fish as their source and start using algae.

the last time benzene celebrated the abundance of earth's resources, i was reminded that transmuting elements is no easy matter. why my critic forgets is that most of the things we need are made up of the same half dozen or so elements which are among the most plentiful, and it isn't so impractical to transmute compounds. one of the more clever ways to do this is to design a little beastie to do the work for you. somewhere in texas they are testing out a genetically engineered bug which eats some sort of coal product (lignite, i think) and excretes it as natural gas. the plan is to let these little guys loose underground somewhere and pipe up the gas without having to strip mine the property. this could be just a start. most of our garbage is paper and plastic, which are made up of hydrogen, carbon and oxygen. it's not too unreasonable to imagine that some day someone will design some bacterium or bug which will eat up our trash and turn it into fuel or food or something useful.

chris carrier (10/19) (i had another letter from chris, from september, but i can't seem to find it.): "as to quayle, i personally think that it was a bad choice on bush's part, for demographic reasons. unfortunately, the GOP has a reputation for being the party of the super-rich (which i feel is undeserved, as we have had only two born-wealthy presidents in the last 50 years and both of them were democrats). so what does bush do? finds one of the few people in this country who has even more wealth in his background than bush himself does!

"the whole wealth issue, as you pointed out, is kind of silly. i might point out, though, that it's an issue raised by the democrats, who keep painting 1988 as a race between mr yale and mr ellis island." ((wisely raised, i think. silly though it was, the issue helped the demos somewhat, i think.))

"i'm beginning to like quayle, because the press has really been bashing him. for example, during the debate with bentsen he was asked if he would reveal his college grades. has bentsen, dukakis or bush been asked to release their grades? by the way, one of the reasons that i am starting to like quayle is the fact that he got into law school via an affirmative action program, since i oppose such programs.

"i liked ed wrobel's political map and letter -- he was right in placing me where he did, right of the average dyed-in-wool republican but left of the libertarians, as i do not favor the dismantling of the basic welfare state established during the roosevelt administration.

"ed pointed out that the term 'liberal' has become a political cussword in reagan's america. why? because the meaning of the word 'liberal' has changed quite a bit in the last generation. consider, say, the democratic platform of 1960 with today. the liberals of 1960 were willing to 'pay any price, bear any burden -- to assure the defense of liberty.' the liberals of the '70s and '80s want us to bug out of our commitments around the world even if it means abandoning our allies to soviet domination. in 1960 liberalism stood for equality of opportunity. in the last 20 years it stands for discriminatory 'affirmative action' program. when kennedy took office, one of his programs was a large tax cut which stimulated the economy and which led to a boom. twenty years later, it was reagan who implemented a tax cut, with the same pleasant results, and he had to fight the liberals every step of the way to do it." ((sure he did, but don't forget that it was also reagan who implemented the large and regressive FICA tax increase. take a look at your next paycheck and see if the FICA deduction isn't more than a third of your total federal tax burden.))

"reagan and fdr make an interesting comparison study. they were, after all, the only presidents in the last 75 years to win by booting out an incumbent running for re-election, and both of them won by huge landslides. if it were not for the 22nd amendment, reagan would easily win landslide re-election every four years for the rest of his life -- like roosevelt. both presidents were well-known for being either loved or hated -- little neutral opinion about both of them. i view fdr, and the basic economic reforms he set up -- minimum wage, social security, maximum

hours, worker safety standards, etc.) as a hegelian thesis, and reagan as his anti-thesis, leading to an eventual synthesis.

"i do agree, though, that the so-called great society and war on poverty, ceta, jtpa, et al was a miserable and expensive failure, and reflected liberalism having grown into bleeding heart crybabyism. when people saw how much it was costing, both in \$ and in national morale, in comes reagan.

"i think wrobel was way out of line (even he himself admits it) in putting you a little right of center -- you seem to be far right of center, even further than me, probably right where the libertarians are. i view the rooseveltian welfare state as a social purchase that people, voting at the polls, will buy as soon as the society as a whole is capable of supporting it. as far as i'm concerned, it's nice to know that when i retire, there is enough money waiting for me (in my case pension plus social security) that i can live decently and with some dignity when i retire, or if i should involuntarily retire early due to disability. minimum wage is needed for the same reason -- it was invented for the same reason -- it was invented for the benefit of working poor 'adults' who have to support themselves and dependents." ((so why don't you call them "crybabies" also?)) "in fact, in light of the great popularity that fdr had in his day, i think the fastest way to reverse the reagan revolution would be for conservatives to embrace ending social security, minimum wage, etc., in which case people will start voting liberal to save their hides. reagan received a mandate to 'modify' the welfare state, not abolish it."

me: that the press has been bashing him is a pretty shallow reason to like someone, i think.

when george shultz secured the denial of a visa for PLO leader yasir arafat to address the united nations in new york, journalists nationwide gravely noted that this was a mistake because it made arafat look like the wronged one and aroused public sympathy for him. these journalists were incorrect. they noted the obvious harm done by denying the visa, but they failed to consider the greater harm which would have been done if the visa hadn't been denied. arafat wasn't coming to new york simply to address the UN; he can do that anywhere. he was coming because he wanted to make a big splash on the american scene. organizations eager to demonstrated their open-mindedness (or eager to hold a prestigious and lucrative fund-raiser) were lining up to invite arafat to their assorted functions and fetes. arafat would be all over the evening news for at least two days and he was ready and able to win the public's heart by playing the persecuted victim role which americans love so well. arafat in new york would have made a significant impression on the public mind; arafat denied a visa made a minor impression which is by now almost forgotten.

it is a similar lack of imagination which has led the same journalists to pronounce that quayle was a bad vp selection, campaign-wise. sure, you can take a poll and get a lot of people to say that quayle made them less likely to vote for bush, but that doesn't mean that he really did make them less likely to vote for bush. voters prove over and over that they are a poor judge of their own motivations. for instance they're always bitching about negative campaigning, yet they are consistently swayed by it. most journalists -- and, alas, most campaign watchers -- look at the campaign one day at a time. it was easy for them to see quayle getting high negatives day after day, but they failed to notice how the focus of the campaign had dramatically shifted. before the selection, the big worries for the republicans were that there would be disunity with the conservatives in the party, and that bush lacked stature and was perceived by the public as a wimp. the quayle story shoved those problems aside and, not coincidentally, they never came back. maybe quayle made quayle look bad, but he made bush look good

where i end up on the left-right spectrum (which these days is an almost meaningless political simplification) depends on what issues you look at. you see my libertarian rantings here in bz and assume that i'm to your right, but you forget about foreign policy and social issues where i am to your left (and sometimes very far to your left. although my economic opinions are the ones i most enjoy arguing,

Your brother addressed a topic I've been intending to discuss ^{re} on the last page of the latest Reason. (that college subsidies drive up prices) I might still address it here some day. Meanwhile, let me point out that the exact same logic applies to medical costs and housing costs. In fact, just look at all the products whose price has gone up ~~higher~~ ~~than~~ faster than the rate of inflation. Behind every one — I'll find a government attempt to make it more "affordable". Yours etc



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